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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH ADVISOR ON GUL VISIT TO DAMASCUS

REF: A. ANKARA 107

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 86

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (c) Turkish Presidency/PM foreign affairs advisor Ahmet Davutoglu briefed Ambassador January 22 regarding President Gul's visit January 19 to Damascus. As noted ref a, the proximate cause was a Syrian invitation to an "Arab Cultural Capital of 2008" event. According to Davutoglu, Gul decided only two days before to accept the invitation, and he did so specifically to help promote a settlement of the Lebanese presidency crisis.

[1](#)2. (c) Gul's main messages mirrored those suggested by Ambassador Satterfield in consultations here one day prior to the visit, according to Davutoglu. Gul urged that the Lebanese presidential election be allowed to proceed as soon as possible and without further conditions. Gul declined to get drawn into discussions of the shape of Lebanon's new government and emphasized instead that the presidency should be resolved first in Sleiman's favor, and government issues should follow. He strongly cautioned the Syrians against letting themselves be portrayed as the bad guy any more; Lebanese politics are complicated enough with further Syrian interference, and the main effect of recent developments has been further to isolate Syria. Gul also urged that the Syrians be in touch urgently with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and Davutoglu believed that this would be happening in coming days.

[1](#)3. (c) Davutoglu, who met separately with Syrian FM Muallem and who has been working quietly behind the scenes on Lebanon for weeks, said that the Syrians were dismissive of the efforts of Arab League SYG Amr Musa, complaining that he "talks too much." Davutoglu said the Arab League had been unhelpful when it opined in a Delphic way on the appropriate allocation of seats in the next Lebanese government. Majority rule means there should be no blocking minority for the opposition, while proportional representation would give the opposition a blocking minority. Davutoglu expressed the view that a way has to be found to thread between these two views that provides unquestionably for governance by the majority and effective administration of the country, and this has apparently been his private message to the parties. He said he cautioned Muallem strongly against 10-10-10; among other things, this would leave Sleiman in a very risky position -- i.e., exposed to assassination in Lebanon's volatile politics. Davutoglu told Ambassador that he thought it reasonable to develop a practical arrangement to ensure that on certain questions (e.g., regarding the next parliamentary elections, non-Sleiman presidency related constitutional changes, etc.), the majority should be required to get some opposition support, but these issues should be few in number.

¶4. (c) Ambassador reiterated Satterfield's main arguments regarding the Lebanese presidency. He recounted developments reflected in ref b, including Amr Musa's belief that the Syrians give priority to their position in Lebanon over hosting an Arab League summit in Damascus. Davutoglu believed that this is true, but added that there are several rounds still to be played out before March. He also argued that Syrian influence in Beirut has its limits, with Hezbollah being more responsive to Tehran than Damascus. Leveraging Asad into a deal on the Lebanese presidency acceptable to the Arab League and the international community could have the added benefit of driving a small, but potentially helpful wedge between Iran and Syria.

¶5. (c) Finally, Davutoglu worried about the possibility of another intersect between crises in Lebanon and Gaza. The deteriorating situation in Gaza gives fodder to Hezbollah and other enemies of the West and democracy in Beirut, he maintained. Davutoglu also said that recent events in Gaza, if left unchecked, are undermining Abu Mazen and will strangle the Annapolis process. He urged a US response to undo the effects of the Israeli blockade that would strengthen Abu Mazen, keep the more positive, post-Annapolis US image intact in the region, and indirectly help calm Lebanese waters.

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WILSON